



# Secret of the Swamp

By James L. Cambias

I don't recall what madness induced me to accompany Dr. Blogsworth and Miss Peabody on their botanical expedition into the Mylomeroean Swamp. For two weeks I lived in damp clothes, with nothing to eat but tinned beef, nothing to drink but brown swamp water, and nothing to do but listen to the two of them bicker about their plant specimens. I decided the swamp was no place for an ambitious young officer of the Queen's army.

Then we found the burned village and the piled bodies, and it seemed as if I might have something to do after all.

**T**he PCs have been persuaded to accompany a scientific expedition into the mist-shrouded backwaters of the Mylmeroean Swamp, north of the British colony on Mars.

The leader is Dr. Clement Blogsworth, a noted scientist, who is offering explorers £200 to join the expedition. (The adventure "The Lurker in the Moor," published in GDW's **More Tales From the Ether**, involves a trip into the Mylmeroean Swamp; at the referee's discretion, that scenario and this one can be combined.)

**Expedition Plan:** There will be six Terrans on the expedition, including Dr. Blogsworth and the PCs (extra Terrans will be NPC scientists). The party is taking food and supplies sufficient for four weeks of travel in the swamp. The entire expedition will travel in 10 collapsible canvas canoes, with 14 Martian bearers. The group will travel north from Syrtis Major aboard a commercial canal-boat. The referee should encourage the players to plan what supplies to bring, within the limits of what the bearers and the canoes can carry.

**Goals:** The expedition's purpose is to explore a large section of the swamp, gathering samples of plants and animals, mapping important terrain features, and establishing friendly relations with the swamp tribes.

**WITHIN THE SWAMP**

The Mylmeroean Swamp is a vast tract of land flooded by a rupture in the Mylarkt-Meroe Canal. It is heavily overgrown, and the waterways are almost always covered by fogs, so that aerial mapping is impossible. No city exerts control over the region, and the constantly shifting waterways are an ideal hideout for bandits and outcasts.

**Travel in the Swamp:** The published adventure "The Lurker in the Moor" contains an excellent map of the swamp and a description of travel conditions there. Referees lacking a copy of it can use the following simplified system to generate terrain. For each new 10-mile hex entered, roll on the table below for the actual ground condition.

Swamp Terrain	
Roll	Result
1	Bog
2-3	Swamp
4	Lake
5	Grassland
6	Forest

Travel is standard for each terrain type. A hex contains a swamp dweller village on a roll of 6. These are mostly small settlements of only a few dozen, but on a second roll of 6, it is a permanent hamlet of 100 people.

**Fever:** For every day spent in the swamps, each member of the expedition has a 1 in 6 chance of contracting **Martian Swamp Fever**. Once infected, the sufferer must make an Endurance task roll each day to recover (Easy if resting and under a doctor's care; Routine if resting or under a doctor's care; Difficult if neither; injuries increase all rolls by one level of difficulty). While suffering from fever, a PC's physical stats are all reduced by 1, and he must make an Easy Endurance roll to avoid suffering hallucinations.

**ENCOUNTERS IN THE SWAMP**

All encounters should be rolled on the table on page 209 of the basic rulebook. All "swamp pirate" and "swamp pirate camp" rolls should be replaced by one of the special encounters described below.

**Suspicious Villagers:** An ordinary settlement of two dozen tribesmen, but they are tremendously hostile to outsiders. The eight warriors and braves will attack the party, first with arrows and then with swords. The tribe will flee if defeated and will not negotiate.

**Abandoned Village:** The PCs come upon a large swamp village that has been completely abandoned. Nothing has been taken from the huts, and food has been left out to spoil, but there are no people anywhere around.

**Creepy Feeling:** All day the members of the expedition will have the feeling they are being watched. Characters may catch a glimpse of someone lurking in the underbrush, but no amount of searching can find the culprit.

**Destroyed Village:** A small settlement is the scene of a terrible massacre. A dozen bodies are scattered about, and all the huts have been looted and burned. There are no survivors.

**PIRATE ATTACK**

After the PCs have been exploring for a while and have had a chance to experience the special encounters, their camp is attacked by a large band of swamp pirates. There should be twice as many pirates as there are members of the expedition. The bandits will kill Martians but will try to take the Terrans alive as prisoners. As the bearers flee in panic and the pirates close in all around, the PCs should realize that surrender is their only option.

The pirates are all armed with cutlasses and rifle muskets, and are all Experienced NPCs. They fight with a discipline and tactical sense unusual for mere bandits.

When the characters have been captured, they will be securely tied and bundled into canoes for the trip back to the pirate camp. All the precious scientific specimens will be left behind.

**SECRET BASE**

*The boat ride seemed to last an eternity. The ropes cut into my arms like knives, and my wound throbbed painfully, but the worst part of the journey was not knowing what lay at the end of it. From the look of my captors, it probably wouldn't be anything pleasant.*

As the pirate canoes round a bend in the waterway, the PCs will be startled to see two Oenotrian cloudships moored at the pirate camp. All around the ships are numerous tents and temporary buildings, while teams of swamp dwellers labor to construct walls and defenses. The two cloudships are a *Hullicutter* and a *Sky Runner* class.

There are 40 swamp pirates living in tents and huts in the center of the camp, and 10 Oenotrian Marines are bivouacked in tents near the two ships. Some 60 swamp villagers have been forced to work at the base, and they sleep out in the open, guarded by pirates and Oenotrians.

To anyone with any military experience, the presence of Oenotrians here is a grave threat to the British colony. The two ships can raid traffic on the canal, blockading the spice trade and endangering the alliance with the Boreosyrtis League. And with much of the British aerial fleet patrolling to the south, the vessels could raid Parhoon and Gorovaan.

**Captain Dasgaar:** The PCs are dragged from the canoes and led through the camp to the big tent, where Dasgaar, the Oenotrian captain, and Katooq, the pirate chief, are waiting.

"What have we here?" exclaims Dasgaar sarcastically. "Red Men! And so very far from their little rat-hole in Syrtis Major, too. You should not have come here, Earthlings. The swamps belong to Martians, not to you. Now who are you and what are you doing here?"

Dasgaar proceeds to grill the PCs about why they are in the swamps. Anyone reluctant to talk will be encouraged by blows and kicks from the Oenotrian Marines guarding the captain. When he is at last satisfied with the

information, Dasgaar will gesture dismissively. "Take them away and confine them with the hostages until dinner-time. I think it would be amusing to be served by an Earthling. We can wait until tomorrow to execute them."

### PRISONERS OF THE OENOTRIANS

The adventurers will be held prisoner aboard the big *Hullcutter*-class screw galley, along with eight tribal leaders from the swamp villages, who are being kept as hostages. The prisoners are locked in the ship's brig, which is guarded by two soldiers. The room has no windows, and the heavy door is bolted from the outside. The PCs will be searched thoroughly, and all tools, weapons or valuables will be taken from them.

**Hostages:** The eight tribal elders will tell the PCs that they and their people were rounded up by the Oenotrians and the pirates, and forced to build fortifications for the base. If the villagers try to resist, the Oenotrians will execute the hostages. The elders are all fearful and will not assist in any escape attempts, but will not betray the characters to the Oenotrians.

**Discovery:** A Routine: Observation skill roll will enable one of the adventurers to notice that one of the swamp

villager hostages is wearing a peculiar dried root around his neck (he says it is a charm against toothache). A Formidable: Biology roll will reveal that the root is actually a potent hallucinogen and soporific. (If none of the PCs can recognize the root, then Dr. Blogsworth will.)

If it could be introduced into the Oenotrian officers' dinner while the PCs are serving them, most of the leaders might be incapacitated, giving the adventurers a chance to escape.

### SLAVES OF THE SWAMP PIRATES

That night, the PCs are removed from the cell and taken to the big tent, where the Oenotrians and the pirates are feasting. Captain Dasgaar and his 10 officers are there, along with Katoq and a dozen of his pirate henchmen. Four Oenotrian Marines and half a dozen pirates are on guard, and everyone is armed.

The Terrans are put to work carrying dishes, cleaning spilled wine, and performing humiliating menial tasks for the Martians. Dasgaar and the others make numerous rude jokes at the expense of the characters, and any women will be coarsely harassed.

**Special Ingredient:** If the PCs have the dried root in a powder, it requires a Difficult: Agility roll to slip it into the food unnoticed.

The drug takes about 15 minutes to take effect. The diners will start to seem drunk, with slurred speech and loss of coordination. Once the hallucinations begin, things will get interesting. The Martians may attack each other or the PCs; the guards may suspect treachery. Both the Oenotrians and the pirates are suspicious of each other anyway, and the drug could bring hidden feelings to the surface. If a brawl begins, the adventurers might be able to slip out of the tent unnoticed, or else attack one of the guards.

**Other Methods:** If the adventurers are not using the drug, they may still be able to sow dissent among their captors. It is easy to see that the pirates and Oenotrians don't quite trust each

other. Appropriate use of Theatrics and Eloquence could be quite effective. A suicidally brave PC might try a show of bravado, challenging one of the leaders to combat. Or else an attractive lady character might distract one of the pirate guards.

### BREAKOUT

If the PCs get a chance to slip out of the dining tent, they have several options. They may simply flee on foot or try to rouse the swamp villagers in revolt. Or players may come up with a plan of their own.

**Escape Into the Swamp:** If the adventurers are all in good health and are skilled at wilderness travel, they may simply run off into the swamp. A band of pirates will follow in pursuit a few minutes later, and the adventure becomes a long chase through the swamp toward the main canal, several days away. The PCs may be able to ambush their pursuers or possibly lose them in the marsh.

**Slave Revolt:** If the PCs are good leaders and are sufficiently eloquent, they may be able to rouse the captive swamp villagers to fight against the Oenotrians and the pirates. The villagers understand Parhooni, and most speak Koline and Umbran as well. It requires a Formidable: Eloquence or Leadership skill roll to get them to fight. If the adventurers have somehow been able to liberate the hostages from the Oenotrian ship, then the task is only Difficult.

**Forces:** There are 40 Oenotrians: 32 sailors (Trained NPCs), armed with swords, and eight marines (Experienced) armed with rifle muskets. There are 20 Trained swamp pirates armed with swords and 15 armed with bows, plus five Experienced pirates armed with rifle muskets. If the PCs have drugged the food in the banquet tent, then the pirates have no leader, and the Oenotrians have only a junior officer aboard the *Hullcutter* to command them.

There are 60 swamp villagers, armed with clubs and knives. They are all Green NPCs. Initially, the villagers have surprise, and attack the pirates in a wild melee. If the PCs are leading the villagers and can do something spectacular, the pirates' morale will break, and they will flee. If not, the pirates will regroup by the Oenotrian ship and try to subdue the villagers.

The Oenotrians' chief concern is to protect their ship, and they will make ready to cast off at the first sign of trouble. They can use the ship's guns with devastating effect against the villagers.

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## OUTCOMES

If the PCs can reach the main canal through the swamp, they can hail a passing canal barge and get safely to Mylarkt.

Once there, they can warn the British military attaché at the consulate, and a squadron of gunboats will be sent to attack the secret base.

A successful revolt of the villagers against the Oenotrians will result in the base being permanently abandoned. The swamp tribes will be very friendly toward Earthmen in the future, and can provide scientists with a huge store of knowledge about the flora and fauna of the wetlands.

If the PCs fail to escape or to defeat the Oenotrians, then Captain Dasgaar will order them executed at dawn. Just as the marines of the firing squad are taking aim at the helpless adventurers, a British gunboat appears overhead and opens fire on the Oenotrians. (Luckily for the characters, the gunboat was passing by just as a break in the swamp mists allowed a glimpse of the two cloudships moored at the base.)

## DR. CLEMENT BLOGSWORTH

Dr. Blogsworth is an eminent botanist and physician who has travelled widely on Mars gathering plant specimens. He is particularly interested in discovering new medicinal plants. The expedition into the Mylomerosean Swamp was his idea, but he is perfectly willing to share command of the party with other experienced travellers.

Attribute	Skills
<b>Str:</b> 2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1
<b>Agl:</b> 1	Marksmanship 1 (rifle)
<b>End:</b> 5	Wilderness Travel 4 (mapping)
<b>Int:</b> 6	Observation 7, Science 5 (biology), Engineering 1 (explosives)
<b>Chr:</b> 3	Eloquence 2, Linguistics 3 (German, Koline, Parhooni)
<b>Soc:</b> 4	Riding 3 (horse), Medicine 3

**Motives:** Knowledge, Steady, Ambitious.

**Description:** Dr. Blogsworth is of medium height, slightly built, and extremely untidy looking. His hair is unbrushed, his clothes are ill-fitting and carelessly mended, and his pockets are stuffed with notes and biological specimens. He is rather shy and quiet, and is only really happy when digging up a newly discovered plant.

**Space:** 1889

## CAPTAIN

### RUTILAAN DASGAAR

Dasgaar is the commander of the Oenotrian forces in the swamp. The idea of the hidden base was his, and he is passionately committed to making it work. If his plan succeeds, then the Oenotrians will be that much closer to driving the Terrans off of Mars, and Dasgaar's prestige and power will be greatly increased. He does not like the swamp very much, as he prefers the comforts of his ship and distrusts his swamp pirate allies.

Attribute	Skills
<b>Str:</b> 2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Trimsman 2 (cloudship), Close Combat 2 (polearms)
<b>Agl:</b> 2	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 1 (rifle)
<b>End:</b> 3	Wilderness Travel 2
<b>Int:</b> 4	Observation 4, Gunnery 1 (MLC), Engineering 1 (earthworks)
<b>Chr:</b> 5	Eloquence 5, Linguistics 3 (Parhooni, English, Umbran), Bargaining 1
<b>Soc:</b> 5	Riding 4 (ruumet breehr), Piloting 2 (cloudship), Leadership 2

**Motives:** Aggressive, Arrogant, Hatred (of Terrans).

**Description:** Dasgaar is a very handsome Martian, with an urbane and polished manner of speaking. He dresses in an ornate uniform which is always immaculate, and goes armed with a knife and a concealed single-shot pistol. His native language is Syrtan.

### AKHAGAAN KATOOQ

Katooq is the chief of the swamp pirates, a position he won by being tougher and more brutal than anyone else. He has a terrible temper, and has been known to kill men for trivial reasons. Katooq doesn't trust the Oenotrians one bit, but is willing to cooperate with them as long as they pay him well.


## Attribute Skills

<b>Str:</b> 4	Fisticuffs 5, Throwing 3, Close Combat 2 (edged)
<b>Agl:</b> 5	Stealth 5, Marksmanship 4 (rifle)
<b>End:</b> 6	Wilderness Travel 7 (foraging), Fieldcraft 2, Swimming 2
<b>Int:</b> 3	Observation 2
<b>Chr:</b> 2	Eloquence 1, Linguistics 1 (Koline)
<b>Soc:</b> 1	

**Motives:** Greedy, Rage, Ruthless.

**Description:** Katooq is not especially big, but he moves with the strength and grace of a steppe tiger. He would be quite handsome were it not for a jagged scar across his face. Katooq dresses in a motley outfit of leather armor and soiled finery, topped off by a bloodstained British officer's coat. His native language is Parhooni. Ω

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